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FARCE, ROMANCE, EMPIRE: ELIZABETH INCHBALD AND COLONIAL DISCOURSE

Betsy Bolton

1

The genre of romance has long been recognized as central to literary developments of the late eighteenth century, especially to what we now know as Romantic poetry and the novel of sentiment.¹ In this essay, I want to suggest the complementary importance of farce, the underside of romance, during the same period. Eighteenth-century farce contained the romance urge to remake the world by focusing on the petty aggressions of the players and their unreconstructed physicality. Farces evoked laughter in part through their explicitly mechanical and unrealistic plots: like romance, they relied on the principle of *deus ex machina*, but with the god removed, so that only the machinery remained. And as late eighteenth-century women novelists began to turn the traditions of romance and sentiment in new directions, so too women playwrights applied the form of farce to issues of gender inequity along with a wide range of other current affairs.

More recently, both farce and romance have provided useful tropes for critics concerned with the political landscape of colonialism. In *The Rhetoric of English India*, Sara Suleri suggests that Anglo-Indian fiction translates colonialism into romance: "In negotiating between the idioms of empire and of nation, the fiction of nineteenth-century Anglo-India seeks to decode the colonized territory through the conventions of romance, reorganizing the materiality of colonialism into a narrative of perpetual longing and perpetual loss."² This translation of material effects into the intangibility of longing and loss also produces a kind of inner division or self-absence: "'India' becomes the absent point toward which nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian narrative may lean but which it may never possess, causing both national and cultural identities to disappear in the emptiness of a representational mirage" (11). While Fredric Jameson suggests that romance originates with a class conflict not yet articulated in terms of class or conflict, Suleri implies that the late eighteenth-century romance of empire originates with a national conflict not yet articulated in terms

of nation.³ As we shall see, the sentimental mode of late or imperial romance attempts to resolve this tension by translating the materiality of colonialism into an appeal to sensibility and moral right.

Farce predictably offers a different view of empire. In “Of Mimicry and Man,” Homi Bhabha further ironizes Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire*, claiming that “[i]f colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce” and “produces a text rich in the traditions of *trompe-l’oeil*, irony, mimicry and repetition.”⁴ The generic gap between (epic) history and farce develops, in Bhabha’s argument, out of the ambivalent alienation at work in Enlightenment accounts of liberty. Locke’s second Treatise uses the word ‘slave’ to denote a legitimate form of ownership in the “colonial” state of Carolina; but in an imagined “original” state of Nature, ‘slavery’ represents for Locke an intolerable abuse of power. The farce of colonialism, Bhabha suggests, is produced by efforts to naturalize the colonial state, to disavow the contradictions which define the institution of imperial power. Colonialism thus remains the “other scene” of European Enlightenment. More specifically, “[t]he colonial discourse that articulates an *interdictory* otherness is precisely the ‘other scene’ of [the] nineteenth-century European desire for an authentic historical consciousness,” a consciousness which would mark “the ending of man’s alienation by reconciling him with his essence” (91). The farce of colonialism reveals the underside of a belated European desire for wholeness and reconciliation—the desire underlying various forms of romance.

While Bhabha and Suleri invoke farce and romance as tropes rather than genres, I want to focus on particular *generic* elaborations of eighteenth-century empire. Eighteenth-century Britons would have been unlikely to remark with Bhabha that colonialism takes power in the name of history and exercises it through the figures of farce. Yet at least one early response to British colonialism, Samuel Foote’s *The Nabob* (1772) represented the return of colonial power—English “Nabobs” grown rich in their exploitation of India—through the figures of stage farce. Foote’s characters are as rigid, bigoted, and stereotypical as their names: the Nabob Sir Mathew Mite, for instance, negotiates with the mayor of the borough of “Bribe-em” for parliamentary seats. The mayor, quite willing to sell himself, nonetheless remains reluctant to sell himself to a Nabob, and his open curiosity over the source of a Nabob’s wealth enables the following exchange with the “Christian” middleman of bribery, Touchit:

Touchit: Why, here are a body of merchants that beg to be admitted as friends, and take possession of a small spot in a country, and carry on a beneficial commerce with the inoffensive and innocent people, to which they kindly give their consent.

Mayor: Don't you think now that is very civil of them?

Touchit: Doubtless. Upon which, Mr Mayor, we cunningly encroach and fortify by little and by little, till at length, we growing too strong for the natives, we turn them out of their lands, and take possession of their money and jewels.

Mayor: And don't you think, Mr Touchit, that is a little uncivil in us?

Touchit: Oh, nothing at all, these people are but a little better than Tartars or Turks.

Mayor: No, no, Mr Touchit; just the reverse; it is they have caught the Tartars in us.⁵

The form of farce licenses an unblinking critique of imperial avarice enclosed within a sense of complicity too great to consider even the possibility of reformation. The Mayor of Bribe'em has, after all, hardly a moral leg to stand on. Farce provides a licensed critique of the open secret, the uncontested scandal.

Only belatedly does colonialism cover its tracks, taking power in the name of history. Supporting Charles Fox's 1783 East India reform bill, Burke acknowledged that the circumstances structuring colonial relations "are not . . . very favourable to the idea of our attempting to govern India at all. But there we are; there we are placed by the Sovereign Disposer: and we must do the best we can in our situation. The situation of man is the preceptor of his duty."⁶ The distance separating this chivalric view of history from farce is slight indeed. Half a page earlier, Burke had echoed the commonplaces cited in Foote's earlier farce: "The Tartar invasion was mischievous; but it is our protection that destroys India. It was their enmity, but it is our friendship" (5.402). Burke's ironic turn of phrase moves away from farce by insisting on the importance of sentiment: England's ruinous "friendship" for India results from the fact that "[y]oung men (boys almost) govern there, without society, and without sympathy with the natives" (5.402). Taking power in the name of history coincides with a turn from farce toward sentiment and romance: the white man's burden is yet another variation on the knight's quest to save the forms of civilization for humanity.

Reading empire through the conventions of farce and romance both privileges and complicates the role of gender within the structures of colonial power. Suleri, for instance, warns against perpetuating the trope of colonization as rape by pointing out the kind of deflection it accomplishes: "When the colonial dynamic is metaphorically represented as a violated female body that can be mourned over with sentimentality's greatest excess, its rape is less an event than a deflection from a contemplation of male embattlement, the figure of which more authentically dictates the boundaries of colonial power" (61). Farce may seem less gender-coded than romance, but while Bhabha writes of mimicry and *man*, his model of mimicry relies on psychoanalytic constructions of femininity. Bhabha adapts his model of

mimicry from Sam Weber's account of the marginalizing effects of castration and its gendered power differential. Weber argues that Lacan's development of the Freudian theory of castration

marks the moment . . . of discovery when the subject is confronted with the object of its desire as being almost nothing, but not quite. The discovery of the penislessness of the mother by the child demolishes—or at least severely disrupts—the “infantile sexual theory” which postulates that all living human beings, regardless of sex, are equipped with the male organ . . . Castration thus . . . prevent[s] the subject from ever being fully present to itself, or fully self-conscious.⁷

Bhabha echoes this language in suggesting that “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as the subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (86). It would be overly schematic to say that the colonial subject plays the role of mother to the colonizer's enactment of the (male) child, since Bhabha's model of colonial identity cuts in both directions simultaneously. Yet in this discussion of mimicry and men, women as independent agents vanish from sight, becoming almost nothing, but not quite. Bhabha's analysis of colonial mimicry is itself constructed around an ambivalence, producing or replicating a slippage between gender and race. Black men under colonialism and white women in psychoanalytic theory mark a difference that is almost the same—but not quite.

Indeed, Bhabha's 1987 discussion of mimicry and man was preceded by Luce Irigaray's 1977 description of mimicry as historically feminine. Irigaray suggests that “[t]here is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one ‘path,’ the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry*. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it.”⁸ The mimicry of femininity make[s] “‘visible,’ by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means ‘to unveil’ the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. *They also remain elsewhere*: another case of the persistence of ‘matter,’ but also of ‘sexual pleasure’” (76). Bhabha emphasizes colonialism as the “other scene” of European Enlightenment. Alienated from Enlightenment by their gender and thus disrupting the terms of this binary split, women remain elsewhere—difficult to fix in either scene.⁹ As Laura Brown suggests in her reading of Aphra Behn's *Oronoko*, “though they [women] have no independent place to stand, in their mediatory role between heroic romance and mercantile imperialism,

they anchor the interaction of these two otherwise incompatible discourses."¹⁰

Elizabeth Inchbald's farce *A Mogul Tale* (1784) and her sentimental comedy *Such Things Are* (1787) stage this mediatory role as the "other scene" of European enlightenment and colonialism alike. Her farce critiques early British imperialism: it does so by parodying even as it produces the colonial paranoia and narcissism Bhabha describes. In Bhabha's account, "the ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry*—a difference that is almost nothing but not quite—to *menace*—a difference that is almost total but not quite" (91). Inchbald's farce pokes fun at colonial paranoia: British fears of Eastern power structures reappear as comedy; menace turns back to the mimicry of farce. Inchbald's sentimental comedy *Such Things Are* then attempts to move beyond critique to a resolution of the problems inherent in colonialism. Yet the comedy's apparent reliance on sentimental benevolence nonetheless exposes female subjection and willing slavery as preconditions for resolving the contradictions of empire. In both plays, Inchbald's use of farce and mimicry reflects colonial critique back onto the gender stereotypes of English identity.

Critics and teachers may shy away from the eighteenth-century stage because of the difficulty involved in recreating what Paula Backscheider has called the "orchestrated languages" of popular drama.¹¹ Yet Inchbald's drama deserves and repays attention—and not only because she was a remarkably successful female playwright in an age when few woman dramatists withstood the strains of theatrical production for more than a brief period.¹² Both the popularity and the explicit politics of her drama make it a valuable resource for cultural critics of the period. While political caricatures took note of the ways her colonial drama refracted contemporary debates over "English India," the complex gender politics that critics have traced in Inchbald's novels can also be seen at work in her plays.¹³ Combining popular appeal and a highly self-conscious critical force, Inchbald's drama offers an expanded sense of late eighteenth-century literary culture even as it provides a particularly canny model of politicized performance.

2

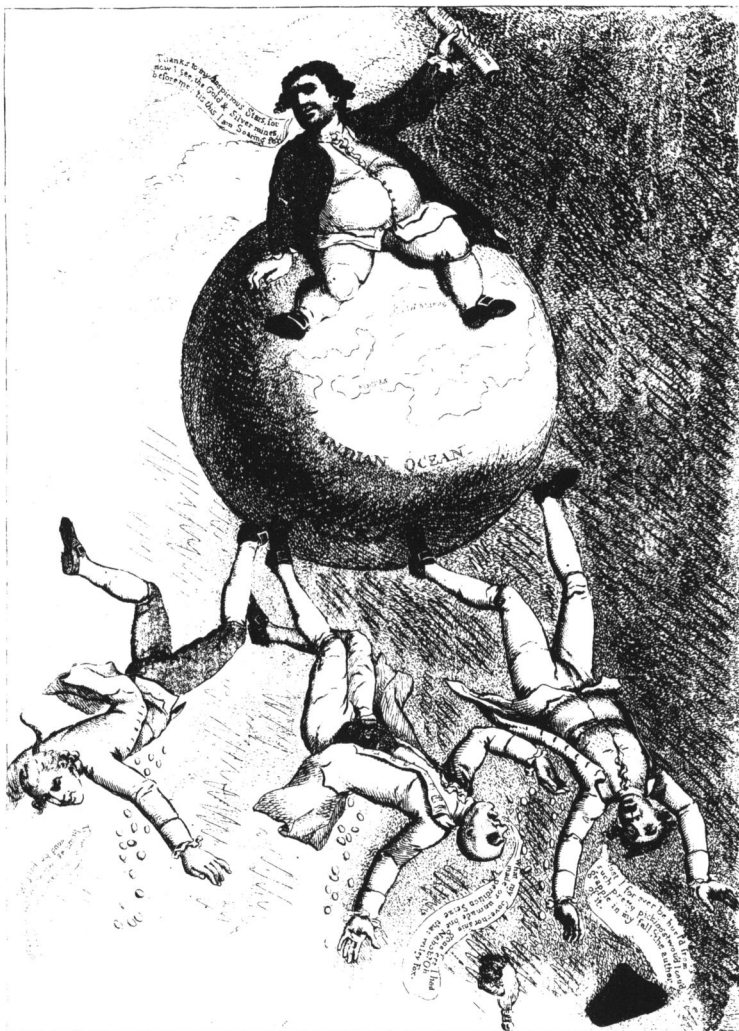
Inchbald's break-through as a playwright came with the production of her farcical afterpiece, *A Mogul Tale*, first staged at Covent Garden on July 6, 1784. The piece appealed to several sets of topical interests: most notably, the pseudo-sciences of quack medicine and balloon travel, and most importantly, concerns about British relations with the "East." Three balloon travelers—a quack "doctor," a cobbler, and his wife—land by accident in the seraglio of the great Mogul, and are led

by their terror into a series of absurd and entertaining masquerades. Throughout these adventures, *A Mogul Tale* balances its frank display of British tyranny and paranoia with a narcissistic portrait of a Mogul indistinguishable from contemporary European philosophers.

The play's topical appeal earned it a public hearing: George Colman, manager of Covent Garden, told Inchbald, "I wish to have the farce completed as soon as possible. The idea is droll, as well as temporary."¹⁴ Inchbald's "idea" simply literalized a series of caricatures linking Indian affairs to the volatility of balloon travel. On December 4, 1783, for instance, W. Wells published an anonymous caricature entitled "The Political Balloon; or, the Fall of East India Stock" (Figure 1).¹⁵ Recalling the excesses of the South Sea Bubble, the balloon caricature reframed Fox's reform bill as a vehicle for personal profit, one which toppled directors and functionaries from their own speculative heights of profit. Fox's India Bill was defeated on December 13th, the Fox-North coalition government was dismissed by the King on December 18th, and the "India Balloon" was well and truly punctured. A revised India Bill was passed only in July of 1784—the month in which *A Mogul Tale* had its debut.

Inchbald's mogul dramatized reformer's support for Indian self-government. In 1783, for instance, the Whig *Annual Register* described one indigenous ruler in glowing terms: "Hyder Ally . . . establish[ed] so mild and equitable a system of government in his dominions, that the new subjects of so many countries were not only attached to his person in a most extraordinary degree, but the neighbouring nations shewed on every occasion their wishes to come under his protection . . . He might profitably have been considered as one of the first politicians of his day, whether in Europe or in Asia."¹⁶ Inchbald's mogul is an equally wise and mild ruler. A philosopher up-to-date with the recent French discovery of ballooning, he plays the oriental despot simply to see how these Europeans will respond: "I mean to save their lives, yet I want to see the effect of their fears; for I love to contemplate that greatest work of Heaven, the mind of man!"¹⁷ In his cultural curiosity, the mogul mirrors French and British *philosophes*; in his plotting, he seems rather to mimic the English playwright, Elizabeth Inchbald.

Inchbald uses the mogul and his court to criticize English views of national virtue: paranoia and vice structure the farce of national identity. The mogul's aide suggests to three terrified Englishmen a strategy of hyperbolic self-representation—he introduces the doctor as an ambassador from the British king, and the cobbler Johnny Atkins as the Pope—and the characters's inept performances produce broad farce. The doctor, for instance, offers only a parodic replication of imperial grandeur:



Pub. Dec. 1793 by W. Wells N° 132 Fleet Street

THE POLITICAL BALLOON; or, the fall of EAST INDIA STOCK

The King, my master, is, by the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, Ireland, Scotland, Northumberland, Lincolnshire, Sheffield, Birmingham—giver of all green, Blue, Red, and pale Blue Ribbons, Sovereign of the most surprising Order of the Bath, Sovereign of the most noble Order of St. Patrick—Grand Master of every Mason Lodge in Christendom, Prince of the River Thames, Trent, Severn, Tyne, New-River, Fleet-Ditch, and the Tweed—Sovereign Lord, and master of many loyal subjects, husband of one good wife, and father of eighteen fine children. (16)

The mogul's aide furnished the doctor with this roll of credentials, so the ludicrous turn from the Sultan's territories to the English king's ribbons, rivers and ditches may be an Indian (and Inchbaldian) satire on good "Farmer George." At the same time, however, dominion over France slides easily into the list, and the conclusion of these credentials replaces the eight thousand islands and one thousand wives of the Sultan with George III's one wife and eighteen children: imperial rule and sexual extravagance are both contained within the king's prolific English family. The doctor's ambassadorial travesty may also have banished worries over a different kind of masquerade. Indicting Hastings in 1788, Burke described the East India Company as "a State in disguise of a Merchant, a great public office in disguise of a Countinghouse" (6: 283-4). Here, power disguises itself in humbler form, extending its range by stealth. Inchbald, by contrast, shows humble persons disguising themselves as figures of state in order to preserve their lives. The lecherous doctor-ambassador and the drunken cobbler-pope appear ludicrously inadequate to the task of maintaining imperial dignity, much less an ideal of Christian morality—but they offer no serious threat to the state.

Inchbald's mogul, for his part, displays colonial narcissism in an early version of Bhabha's "mimic man:" the Anglicized Indian. Pronouncing judgment on the three invaders, the mogul first presents himself as the bogeyman of the European imagination: "Keep silence, while I pronounce judgment.—Tremble at your approaching doom! You are not now before the tribunal of a European, a man of your own colour. I am an Indian, a Mahometan; my laws are cruel and my nature savage!" While the audience has been privileged to see beyond this performance, the characters take this paranoid vision at face value, producing the farcical spectacle of Englishmen deluded by their own fears and an Indian's ironic self-presentation. The mogul then sketches his own ostensible reform in language redolent of European missionaries: "[K]now that I have been taught mercy and compassion for the sufferings of human nature, however differing in laws, temper and colour from myself. Yes, from you christians, whose laws should teach charity to all the world, have I learnt these virtues!" Here, characters and audience alike are tempted to believe. Yet the mogul's closing lines rapidly invert this picture of reform, and the ideal of

Christian English virtue it supports: “Your countrymen’s cruelty to the poor Gentoos has shown me tyranny in so foul a light, that I have determined henceforth to be only mild, just, and merciful . . . You are too much in my power to be treated with severity—all three may freely depart” (24-5)! The mogul learns not from Christian benevolence, but from the negative mirror of Christian tyranny; the audience is invited to learn in turn from the ethical model of the mogul-philosopher. In *A Mogul Tale*, colonial narcissism requires the abjection of British vice and folly in order for the audience to maintain its identification with Enlightenment (oriental) benevolence.

Inversion defines the politics of *A Mogul Tale*: Christianity and British imperialism are unveiled as tyranny, while the oriental despot appears as a gentle ruler. Such inversions do not, however, apply to gender. The *Tale* opens with the women of the seraglio arguing over their standing in the mogul’s favor—an image of sexual oppression unaltered by the mogul’s modern philosophy. Indeed, Inchbald seems to present sexual inequity in Eastern culture as more essential than constructed. The intoxicated Johnny is happy to court any of the “soul-less” women of the seraglio, yet he unerringly (and unknowingly) selects Fanny as his favorite of them all, as if she were indeed the only one to possess (an English) spirit. Joyce Zonana’s account of feminist orientalism seems especially apt here: an underlying assumption of gender superiority licenses Inchbald’s farcical critique of British nationalism and imperialism.¹⁸ Yet Inchbald’s treatment of gender also sharpens her critique of English exploitation. Johnny, for instance, tries to use the “Muslim” belief that women have no souls as a strategy of seduction: “But if you have no soul, you have a pretty body, a very pretty body,—that I do assure you;—and I am a sweet soul, and what is a body good for without a soul?” When the Muslim Irene counters by asking, “Have your countrymen souls?” Johnny can only assert “They have a great deal of spirit” (19). Englishmen have (or perhaps imbibe) a great deal of spirit—but this does not necessarily entitle them to the claim of a soul.

At other moments, the mimicry of *A Mogul Tale* draws attention to the gap between ideal and reality back in England: here, too, women bear the brunt of the discrepancy. The lament for home at the center of the farce, for instance, develops an ideal of bourgeois domesticity undercut in the very process of its presentation:

John. Oh, Fan, Fan! if we were but once at Wapping again, mending of shoes, in our little two pair back room—with the bed just turned up on one side—

Fan. My Johnny and I sitting so comfortable together at breakfast, and pawning your waistcoat to get it; with one child crying on my knee, and one on yours; my poor old mother, shaking with the ague, in a corner of the room, and the cat

and dog fighting in the other. Oh, Johnny! the many happy mornings that we have got up together quaking with the cold!—No balloon to vex us—
 John. Ay, and the many times, after threshing you well, Fan, when we kissed and made it up again— (18)

As this English couple nostalgically insists “There’s no place like home,” their nostalgia merely highlights the sufferings of working-class domesticity. Their longed-for domestic space is cramped and invaded by labor; poverty, tears, illness and physical abuse represent the ideal of family intimacy. The working-class cobbler family mimics and thus parodies the bourgeois construction of domestic peace and love. While both husband and wife comically idealize their material constraints, Fanny’s account sketches their farcical sufferings much more vividly. Johnny’s loose syntax, meanwhile, turns his beating of Fanny into a communal project: “we” both “thresh . . . you” before kissing and making up. If the domestic relations of John and Fanny Atkins remain far from any bourgeois ideal, Fanny herself appears complicit in her husband’s abuse of her. Both in the Sultan’s court and in working-class England, women seem content with their state of oppression: their contentment at once underwrites and highlights the inequities it ostensibly ignores.

3

A Mogul Tale plays off eighteenth-century associations of farce with vulgar or working-class characters.¹⁹ In *Such Things Are*, however, Inchbald broadens her social scope, mingling the conventions of farce with those of romance, and (like Samuel Foote and David Garrick before her) deploying a farcical mimicry of famous men. Such mimicry was no respecter of social boundaries: indeed, it seemed to vulgarize whomever it attacked. On April 30, 1748, for instance, Henry Fielding’s “Court of Criticism” indicted “*Samuel Fut*” for the use of a “hatchet-face” against various persons, alleging that Foote had “maul[ed] and hack[ed]” them “in a certain Part called the Character” and asserting that “this Buffonry [does not] require any Capacity, unless that of mimicking the Voice, Features, and Gestures of another Man, the meanest and vilest of all Arts.”²⁰ Mimicry, itself a low form, exposed men of all classes to debasement through ridicule. David Garrick’s prologues worked to distance his drama from Foote’s theatrical excesses, yet even this greatest of eighteenth-century actors relied on mimicry in performing his own plays. Mary Granville, for instance, said of Garrick’s farce *Miss in her Teens* (1747), “nothing can be lower, but the part he acts in it himself (Mr. Fribble) he makes so very ridiculous that it is really entertaining. It is said he mimics eleven men of fashion.”²¹

Following the model set by Garrick and Foote, Inchbald's *Such Things Are* moved beyond the class assumptions of farce to use mimicry against characters at all levels of society. Yet even as Inchbald's use of mimicry intensifies and extends the social (and critical) range of *Such Things Are*, her mixed drama attempted to move beyond farce to offer a model of positive colonial relations. Unfortunately, the attempt to replace mimicry with benevolent despotism leads to the replications of farce (here, a repeated splitting or doubling of identity) and to the self-conscious performance of a benevolence dependent on the linked yet divided pairs of romance and farce, actor and spectator, master and slave.

Inchbald's preface to *Such Things Are* presents it as a drame-à-clef with a divided plot, based on the moral polarity of two famous men: Lord Chesterfield, whose posthumously published *Letters to his Son* were simultaneously a scandal and a best-seller; and John Howard, a prison reformer famous for his philanthropy both in England and abroad. The farcical character Twineall displays the absurdities of Chesterfield's cynical self-interest, while Haswell represents the opposing virtues of Howard's active benevolence as he traveled through Europe and Asia: "As Haswell is the hero of the serious part of this play, so is Twineall of the comic half. His character and conduct is formed on the plan of Lord Chesterfield's finished gentleman . . . [T]he public appeared to be as well acquainted with [Chesterfield's] despicable reputation, as with the highly honourable one of Howard."²² The farcical plot of *Such Things Are* focuses on relations among a British expatriate community, where the practice of shipping unmarried women to the colonies to find husbands results in the ongoing marital skirmishes of Sir Luke and Lady Tremor, skirmishes complicated by the attentions of Lord Flint, an upper-class tool of local tyranny. The cycle of the marriage market repeats itself (with better results, presumably) in the more sentimental courtship of Elvire and Aurelia, though their romance is complicated by the imprisonment of Elvire's father for rebellion against the Sultan. Twineall, newly arrived from England, attempts to manipulate this corrupt and imperfect society for his personal gain, and is nearly executed for his pains. In contrast to this farcical background, the sentimental plot of the comedy highlights the plight of the Sultan, an oriental despot *malgré lui*, and his lost and much-lamented European wife. Haswell the savior serves as a lynch pin between the two plots, providing a model of virtue for the British as he labors to reform native abuses of power.

Even to begin with, however, the play's farcical response to Chesterfield is far more complicated and ambivalent than the preface would suggest. Within *Such Things Are*, Twineall performs in exaggerated

fashion the various social sins against which Chesterfield attempts to warn and school his son. By contrast, Lord Flint displays a mixture of selfish policy, subservience to foreign despotism, and manipulation of women: the worst traits Chesterfield's letters were thought to develop. The figure of Chesterfield within the play is thus split into a version of performance that undoes itself, and a more cynical performance that undoes others. Twineall's mimicry of Chesterfield produces farce, but the connection between this broad comedy and Lord Flint's more dangerous performance remains visible only to those already familiar with Chesterfield's system.

Chesterfield warns his son against dressing badly, muttering, and flattering by system or report; Twineall, by acting in contradiction to each of these warnings, suggests the validity rather than the folly of Chesterfield's advice. Chesterfield emphasizes the importance of first impressions, insisting that "A man of sense . . . dresses as well, and in the same manner, as the people of sense and fashion of the place where he is."²³ Yet Twineall first appears on the stage in a "fashionable undress" so *outré* that Sir Luke feels it necessary to inform Lady Tremor that "that is a gentleman, notwithstanding his appearance" (14-5). Worried over reports that his son muttered and spoke indistinctly, Chesterfield wrote attacking "the modern art *de persifler*" which "consists in picking out some grave, serious man, who neither understands nor expects raillery, and talking to him very quick, and in inarticulate sounds" (1:90). Twineall exaggerates this "art" into a principle of evasive discourse: "when a gentleman is asked a question which is either troublesome or improper to answer, he does not say he won't answer it, even though he speaks to an inferior; but he says, 'Really it appears to me o-e-e-e-e—[Mutters and shrugs.]—that is—mo-mo-mo-mo-mo—[Mutters.]—if you see the thing—for my part—te-te-te-te—and that's all I can tell about it at present" (17). Finally, while Chesterfield endeavors to teach his son the art of flattery, he carefully limits the practice of this art. Flattery, for Chesterfield, requires intensive knowledge of the world and of the people one would flatter: flattery becomes the art of social recognition. Twineall attempts to learn the world by description and to flatter by report. He asks Meanwright for intelligence of the Tremors and Flint: "Come, give me all their characters—all their little propensities—all their whims—in short, all I am to praise, and all I am to avoid praising, in order to endear myself to them" (23). Chesterfield would think Twineall's near-execution a just reward for this laziness, this unwillingness to learn his part. Twineall's flattery is deficient not only in preparation but also in execution: while Chesterfield warns against systematic or criminal flattery, Twineall practices both. In direct

contradiction of Chesterfield's maxim ("flatter nobody's vices or crimes: on the contrary, abhor and discourage them" [1:29]), Twineall boasts to Meanwright, "I will myself, undertake to praise the vices of a man of sentiment, till he shall think them so many virtues" (25). And Twineall's application of flattery is as indiscriminate as that of the system-monger Chesterfield attacks: "he daubs and besmears the piece he means to adorn. His flattery offends even his patron; and is almost too gross for his mistress" (1: 334-5). For Chesterfield as well as Inchbald, Twineall would provide a model of how not to behave.

Lord Flint, by contrast, displays the darker side of the nobleman's social cynicism. First mentioned for his manners and "*politesse*" (far more successful than Twineall's bungling), he nonetheless exhibits another of Chesterfield's pet peeves: in company, Flint, like the nobleman's son, is "frequently most provokingly inattentive, absent, and distrait" (Chesterfield, 1:212). Flint's repeated distraction while in company confirms his contempt for those around him. As Sir Luke notes, "though he forgets his appointments with his tradesmen, did you ever hear of his forgetting to go to court when a place was to be disposed of? Did he ever make a blunder, and send a bribe to a man out of power? Did he ever forget to kneel before the prince of this island, or to look in his highness's presence like the statue of patient resignation, in humble expectation" (11)? Flint's contempt for English company is presented partly as a result of his upbringing. As Chesterfield sent his son to become familiar with the various courts of Europe, so Flint, "[s]ent from his own country in his very infancy, and brought up in the different courts of petty arbitrary princes here in Asia, . . . is the slave of every rich man, and the tyrant of every poor one" (11). Flint aspires to the powers of despotism for himself; he acts as the Sultan's agent of surveillance in order to deal in decisions of life and death. Hearing that Twineall has insulted Lady Tremor, he responds that Twineall "is a disaffected person—boldly told me he doubted the Sultan's right to the throne.—I have informed against him; and his punishment is left to my discretion. I may have him imprisoned, shot, sent to the gallies, or his head cut off—but which does your ladyship choose?—Which ever you choose is at your service [Bowling]" (53). Yet while Flint appears to give the decision over to Lady Tremor, she promptly hands it back to him, and Flint himself chooses execution as Twineall's fate. Indeed, Flint's apparent deferral to her opinion merely enacts Chesterfield's advice on how to win women's adoration: "being justly distrustful that men in general look upon them in a trifling light, [women] almost adore that man who talks more seriously to them, and who seems to consult and trust them; I say, who seems; for weak men really do, but wise ones only seem to do it" (1:107).

Unfortunately, Flint is neither wise nor weak; in his ability to influence as well as enact despotic power, he presents the dangers implicit in the social cynicism of Chesterfield's *Letters*.

Inchbald presents Chesterfield, split into the opposite figures of Flint and Twineall, as a negative model of masculine social performance. Yet naming Twineall alone as the figure for Chesterfield distracts attention from the subtler dangers of Flint: a spectator would need substantial familiarity with the *Letters* to recognize that the figure of Flint actually offers the critique of the *Letters* supposedly embodied in Twineall. The doubling of Chesterfield within the play may be designed to appeal to separate audiences: one which is able to interpret only broad farce, the other better read, if not more politically astute and socially discerning. Yet in any case, these figures of farce, paranoid and self-parodic, appear largely as a counterpoint to the performance of radical benevolence idealized in Haswell. Self-divided even in its duplicity, Inchbald's farcical plot increasingly verges on the serious.

With Haswell, Inchbald attempts to step outside the limits of farce. The play proposes Howard/Haswell's active benevolence as a real-life alternative to despotic injustice. Yet by re-presenting Howard's benevolence on stage, *Such Things Are* begins to unravel the opposition it ostensibly creates between Chesterfield's hypocritical performance and Howard's sincere benevolence. The demands of theater and the ubiquity of performance begin to infect and affect the ideal of manly sensibility with mimic duplicity. To maintain the distinction between performance and manly sensibility, Haswell must remain free of theater, and so cannot call attention to his own performance of benevolence. As a result, however, benevolence as a performance, an "act" of virtue, is split into two parts within the world of the play: charity exists only when registered by a spectator or recipient. The Sultan himself defines Haswell's virtue by report: "They tell me, that in our camps you visited each sick man's bed, administered yourself the healing draught, encouraged our savages with the hope of life, or pointed out their better hope in death.—The widow speaks your charities, the orphan lisps your bounties, and the rough Indian melts in tears to bless you" (44-5). The hero's sensibility speaks not *in propria persona*, but through the figures of widows, orphans, savages, and observers: more than one person is required for its representation.

More ominously, the play's ideal of benevolence seems most clearly performed in an exchange between Haswell and the "tawny Indian" Zedan—an exchange which articulates quite clearly the roles of master and slave. As Haswell visits the prison, Zedan picks his pocket and steals his purse. Yet when Haswell, unaware of the theft, offers Zedan his pity and a pittance with which to relieve his immediate needs,

Zedan's conversion is instantaneous. Returning the wallet, he articulates the power of benevolence: "'Tis something that I never felt before—it makes me like not only you, but all the world besides.—The love of my family was confined to them alone—but this sensation makes me love even my enemies" (34). Inchbald's biographer James Boaden described this scene as the climax of the drama: "Nature in a moment bursts through the villany [sic] which slavery had taught her; he throws himself upon his knees before Haswell, and with convulsive emotion restores the pocket-book. The effect was electric. Fearon [the actor], a rough but valuable man, struck it by his action into every heart; and Mrs. Inchbald must have trembled under the severe delight of applause that never was exceeded in a theatre" (242).

In the "electric" process of representation, benevolence splits into the linked figures of benefactor and recipient, explicitly aligned with the imperial pairing of master and slave. Haswell eventually secures Zedan's release, and the Indian comes to thank him and bid him farewell. Explaining that he departs only because he has "a family in sorrow till [his] return," Zedan insists that otherwise, "you [Haswell] should be my master, and I would be your slave" (76-7). The performance of benevolence paradoxically produces the figure of the willing slave: an oxymoron to which we (and Inchbald) will return.

This master-slave performance of benevolence provides a dubious model for colonial reform. When, in colonial encounters, "a disembodied notion of cultural exchange merges 'love' [benevolence] with 'fear and loathing' [slavery]," this creates "a historical context where nationalism is synonymous with terror" (Suleri, 4). *Such Things Are* simultaneously domesticates and disavows that terror. If benevolence is performed through the relation of master and slave, *English* benevolence establishes itself as master over oriental despotism: Haswell's benevolence makes him nominal master not only of the tawny Indian Zedan, but also of the Sultan himself. Haswell's Christian virtue calls forth from the Sultan the confession of having once been a Christian himself, converted by his European wife. This confession rapidly becomes the fulcrum on which the Sultan's life and the plot of the play together turn; he describes his Arabella as

a lovely European, sent hither in her youth, by her mercenary parents, to sell herself to the prince of all these territories. But 'twas my happy lot, in humble life, to win her love, snatch her from his expecting arms, and bear her far away; where, in peaceful solitude we lived, till, in the heat of the rebellion against the late Sultan, I was forced from my happy home to take a part.—I chose the imputed rebels' side, and fought for the young aspirer.—An arrow, in the midst of the engagement, pierced his heart; and his officers, alarmed at the terror this stroke of fate might cause among their troops, urged me (as I bore a strong resemblance to him,) to counterfeit a greater still, and show myself to the soldiers as their king recovered. I yielded to their suit, because it gave me ample power to avenge the loss of my Ara-

bella, who had been taken from her home by the merciless foe, and barbarously murdered. (45-6)

This story, the secret heart of the sentimental comedy, establishes the Sultan's despotism as a result of absence rather than presence: this counterfeit Sultan's vengeance records the empty and thwarted domestic longings of romance (his desire for Arabella) rather than a will to power in its own right. Through this revelation, however, the omnipotent Sultan stands revealed as a cipher, split between East and West: the inscrutability of oriental vengeance becomes remarkably difficult to distinguish from the internalized role of the devoted (Westernized) husband. Romance unveiled replicates some of the internal divisions associated with farce.

Haswell offers a verbal performance of benevolence as comfort and cure to those internal divisions. He proposes to treat the Sultan's disease by further Anglicizing him, completing his domestication through the experience of benevolence.

Sultan: What medicine will you apply?

Haswell: Lead you to behold the wretched in their misery, and then show you yourself in their deliverer.—I have your promise for a boon—'tis this:—give me the liberty of six whom I shall name, now in confinement, and be yourself a witness of their enlargement.—See joy lighted in the countenance where sorrow still has left its rough remains—behold the tear of rapture chase away that of anguish—hear the faltering voice, long used to lamentation, in broken accents utter thanks and blessings!—Behold this scene, and if you find the prescription ineffectual, dishonour your physician. (46-8)

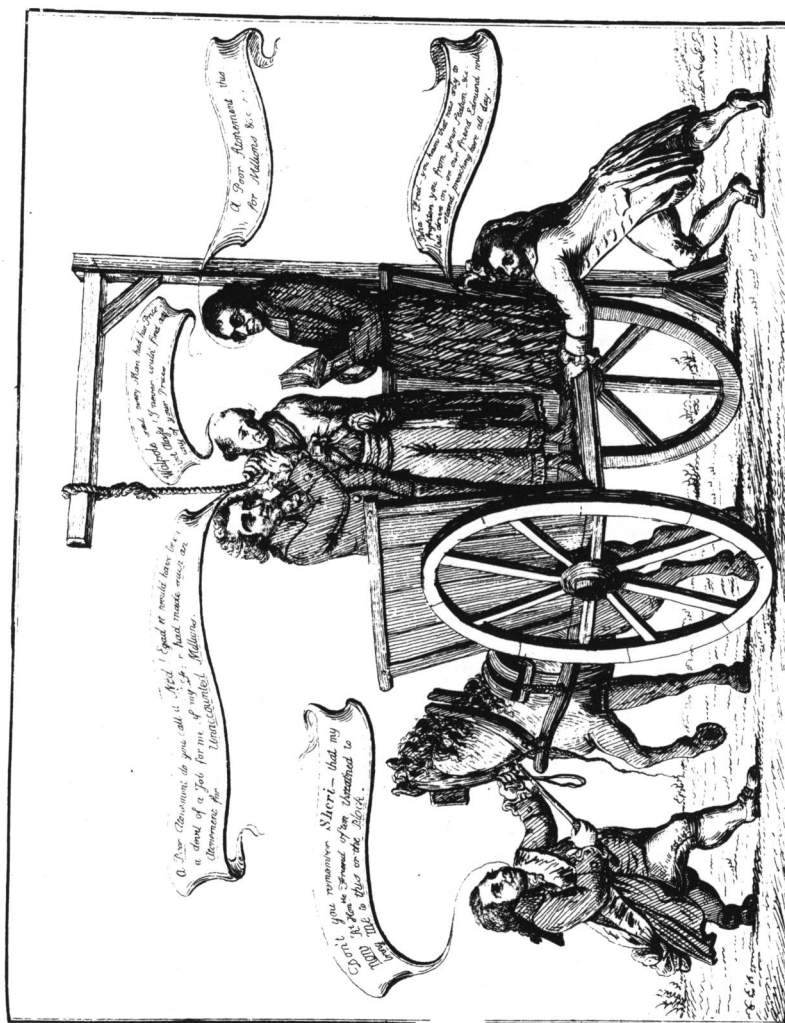
Haswell's description reinstalls the Sultan as master over slaves, but shows that mastery performed through deliverance and liberation. Within the logic of the play, the Sultan's power to imprison is really impotence, for it keeps him from his heart's desire, the recovery of his European wife. For Eastern rulers to gain real power, the play suggests they must become, like English gentlemen, exemplars of the hidden mastery of benevolence.

Ironically, Haswell as doctor and master of benevolence proposes to stage a scene of sentimentality: one which he anticipates in this verbal performance of tears and rapture. Inviting this patient to see himself in the role of deliverer, he asks the Sultan simultaneously to occupy that role and stand outside it. Haswell's prescription of benevolence thus replaces one split subjectivity (native/Christian) with a slightly different mode of self-division. The splitting of despotic power into the actor/spectator of benevolence turns the anti-theatrical ideal of virtue back into the kind of performance Chesterfield himself could espouse on the grounds of self-interest: "But am I blamable if I do a good action, upon account of the happiness which that honest consciousness will give me? Surely not" (1:106). Haswell, urging the

theatrical pleasures of benevolence on the Sultan, sounds surprisingly like Chesterfield himself.

In Haswell's influence over the Sultan, we see "a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" (Bhabha, 86). Yet Haswell's benevolent despotism also mimics the power it pretends to appropriate, developing into a model of moral surveillance and potential oppression. During the minor episode in which Elvirus masquerades as a Mr. Glanmore to hide his illicit courtship of Aurelia, Haswell sternly questions both partners in deception (i.e., "Why do you blush, Aurelia?" [56]). He proceeds to discipline Elvirus by playing on the son's fears for his father—whose liberty remains at Haswell's "benevolent" disposal. The Sultan and Haswell become increasingly difficult to distinguish, as do Haswell and Flint's relations to power. As the saintly Englishman teaches the Sultan to see his mastery at once transformed and maintained through the performance of benevolence, he also allows the audience or careful reader to see the absolute power associated with oriental despotism installed at the heart of the West's claim to civilized and social virtue. That lesson could be applied back to the show trial of the Hastings impeachment: the 1788 caricature entitled "Such Things May Be" presented Burke as just such a civilized (pseudo-clerical) despot (Figure 2).²⁴

The mimicry of *Such Things Are* cuts in two directions: if the Sultan, like the mogul, seems a fitting example of Bhabha's mimic man, Haswell's benevolence also replicates the internal divisions and power relations of "oriental" despotism. The scene of benevolence performed by these two men concludes the Sultan's romance of longing for his absent wife—but the resolution of romance depends upon the willing subjection of that missing woman. Indeed, the virtuous Arabella might be considered an inverted "mimic woman," demonstrating the extent to which the ideal English heroine is just barely distinguishable from the stereotype of slavish oriental femininity—and then only on racial grounds. At first a generic female prisoner eager for freedom, Arabella rapidly resigns herself to continued imprisonment, telling Haswell, "When you first mentioned my release from this dark dreary place, my wild ideas included, with the light, all that had ever made the light a blessing.—'Twas not the sun I saw in my mad transport, but a lost husband filled my imagination—'twas his idea, that gave the colours of the world their beauty, and made me fondly hope to be cheered by its brightness . . . But in a happy world, where smiling nature pours her boundless gifts! oh! there his loss would be insupportable" (63). This resignation—with its melancholy translation of the lost husband into the light of the world—also marks the



Such things may be.

A Tale for future times.

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moment at which the “female prisoner” of the play pronounces her own (European) name: Arabella. Haswell marks this transformation by “starting” and inquiring, “Are you a Christian? an European” (63)? In a much earlier scene, Arabella had rebuked Haswell for doubting her honesty, then apologized in racially coded terms: “Forgive me—I am mild with all these people—but from a countenance like yours—I could not bear reproach” (31). Despite her own racial pride, however, Arabella’s race and religion remain imperceptible to other characters in the play until the closing action. She becomes visible as a Christian and a European in the moment she resigns herself to slavery. Brought before the Sultan, whom she fails to recognize as her husband, Arabella explains to him that freedom without his companionship is a meaningless term: “were I free in this vast world, forlorn and friendless, ’tis but a prison still” (70). The Sultan’s identity revealed, Arabella changes the context while retaining the concept of captivity: “[*Recovering.*] Is this the light you promised?—[*To Haswell.*]—Dear precious light!—Is this my freedom? to which I bind myself a slave for ever—[*Embracing the Sultan.*]—Was I your captive?—Sweet captivity! more precious than an age of liberty” (71)! Life without her husband is a prison; life with him is sweet captivity: life without captivity appears unthinkable.

In *A Mogul Tale*, Inchbald seemed to suggest that women of the East accept subjection and imprisonment because of some fundamental difference from Western women; in *Such Things Are*, she shows a European woman embracing “Eastern” captivity through marriage—and receiving general praise for her actions. A difficult moment to read, this sentimental resolution substitutes for the feminist orientalist equation of Western men with Eastern despots, the slightly different equation of Western women with Eastern subjection. Yet Inchbald balks at presenting on stage the figure of an Indian or Sumatran woman: the princess of this island can only be imagined as a European. The “oriental woman” remains obscure, inscrutable—literally invisible within the world of the play. As European women become defined by servitude and captivity (or vulgarity), East Indian women vanish entirely from the scene.

If Homi Bhabha’s analysis of colonial mimicry slides from the mimicry of gender to that of race and colonial power, Elizabeth Inchbald’s dramatization of mimicry in the English colonies moves in the opposite direction. *Such Things Are* uses a colonial setting to explore social relations within an expatriate *English* community and to question *English* ideals of benevolence and femininity. Inchbald’s later plays retreat even farther from English India: *Wives as they Were, Maids as they Are* (1797) features a returning Nabob, Sir William, but focuses on his

daughter's romantic and economic trials and tribulations; *The Wise Man of the East* (1799), Inchbald's translation of another Kotzebue drama, features an English father masquerading as an Indian in order to keep an eye on his wayward son. Inchbald's tendency to use India simply as an explanation for familial absence in these later dramas matches England's growing apathy toward India in the wake of the Hastings trial (1788-94). In her early plays, however, Inchbald refused to distinguish clearly between the farce of gender and that of colonialism. Especially in *A Mogul Tale* and *Such Things Are*, her use of mimicry cuts in multiple directions, simultaneously mocking state politics and reigning assumptions of gender and racial subordination.

In the latter years of her career, Inchbald continued to connect theatrical mimicry with that produced by femininity and by political farce. In an 1807 essay to *The Artist*, for instance, Inchbald contrasted the freedom of the novelist with the constraints of the playwright:

The Novelist is a free agent. He lives in a land of liberty, whilst the Dramatic Writer exists but under a despotic government.—Passing over the subjection in which an author of plays is held by the Lord Chamberlain's office, and the degree of dependence which he has on his actors—he is the very slave of the audience. He must have their tastes and prejudices in view, not to correct, but to humour them. Some auditors of a theatre, like some aforesaid novel-readers, love to see that which they have seen before; and originality, under the opprobrious name of innovation, might be fatal to a drama, where the will of such critics is the law, and execution instantly follows judgment.²⁵

Like executions in the Sultan's prisons, the audience's condemnation brooks no delay or leisurely reflection. Yet while Inchbald asserts that the author of a play "is the very slave of the audience," the series of prohibitions she goes on to list are for the most part prohibitions she herself has transgressed. In particular, Inchbald claims that "A dramatist must not speak of national concerns, except in one dull round of panegyrick"—yet as we have seen, two of her early plays ridiculed Anglo-Indian relations. The playwright, like the "willing" female slave, uses mimicry to expose the extent and prevalence of slavery. Inchbald both draws on and "takes off" the tropes of despotism, replicating the mesconnaissances of "benevolent" colonial expansion on the stages of London, as they in turn are asked to mirror (and mimic) the domestic spaces of the empire. The influence of her work in the mixed realms of literature, theatre, and politics has yet to be fully acknowledged.

NOTES

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1. See for instance Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest Romance" in *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, 1970); Marlon Ross, "Romantic Quest and Conquest" in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne Mellor (Bloomington, 1988); Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago, 1995). In this essay, I read the conventions of sentimentality as one late flowering of the romance tradition.
2. Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago, 1992), 11.
3. See Fredric Jameson, "Magical Narratives" in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, 1981).
4. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York, 1994), 85.
5. Samuel Foote, "The Nabob" in *The Works of Samuel Foote, Esq.*, 3 vols., ed. Jon Bee (London, 1830), 3:213-4.
6. Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, 9 vols (New York, 1981), 5:403-4.
7. Samuel Weber, "The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment," *Modern Language Notes*, 88:6 (1973): 1112.
8. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, 1985), 76.
9. For women's alienation from Enlightenment ideals, see Mary Jacobus, "'The Science of Herself': Scenes of Female Enlightenment" in *Intersections: Nineteenth-Century Philosophy and Contemporary Theory*, eds. Tilottama Rajan and David Clark (Albany, 1995).
10. Laura Brown, "The Romance of Empire" in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, eds. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York, 1987), 54-5.
11. Paula Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* (Baltimore, 1993), 185.
12. See Ellen Donkin, *Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London, 1776-1829* (New York, 1995).
13. See for instance, Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: the Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford, 1986).
14. James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, 2 vol. (London, 1833), 1:185.
15. "The Political Balloon; or, the Fall of East India Stock" (Dec. 4, 1783; this item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA). This anonymous print showed Charles Fox, author of a controversial East India Reform bill, exulting over the power and wealth he would allegedly gain through reform. The globe on which Fox sits is filled by the map of India: England becomes invisible on this face of the earth. Fox's reform measures would have toppled the company's directors from power: three of the directors are shown here, lamenting their fall.
16. Quoted in George Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India, 1784-1858* (New York, 1961) 15.
17. Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Mogul Tale, or, The Descent of the Balloon: A Farce* (London, 1796), 14.
18. Zonana argues that "feminist orientalism is a rhetorical strategy (and a form of thought) by which a speaker or writer neutralizes the threat inherent in feminist demands and makes them palatable to an audience that wishes to affirm its occidental superiority. [. . .] Orientalism—the belief that the East is inferior to the West, and the

18. Zonana argues that "feminist orientalism is a rhetorical strategy (and a form of thought) by which a speaker or writer neutralizes the threat inherent in feminist demands and makes them palatable to an audience that wishes to affirm its occidental superiority. [. . .] Orientalism—the belief that the East is inferior to the West, and the representation of the Orient by means of unexamined, stereotypical images—thus becomes a major premise in the formulation of numerous Western feminist arguments" [594].

19. See for instance Henry Fielding's Prologue to *The Lottery; A Farce* (1732):

As Tragedy prescribes to passion rules,
So Comedy delights to punish fools;
And while at nobler games she boldly flies,
Farce challenges the vulgar as her prize.

Henry Fielding, *The Complete Works*, 16 vols., ed. William E. Henley (New York, 1967), 8: 267.

20. Henry Fielding, *The Jacobite's Journal and Related Writings*, ed. W. B. Coley (Wesleyan, CT, 1975), 261-5.

21. Letters 1:88, quoted in *The Plays of David Garrick*, eds. Harry William Pedicord and Fredrick Louis Bergmann (Carbondale, 1980), 391.

22. Elizabeth Inchbald, *Such Things Are: A Play, in Five Acts. As Performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. Printed Under the Authority of the Managers from the Prompt Book. With Remarks by the Author* (London, 1808), 5.

23. Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to his Son*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1901), 1:151.

24. "Such Things May Be. A Tale for Future Times" (March 1, 1788; this item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA), reapplied the title of Inchbald's East Indian drama to the London show trial of Warren Hastings, ex-Governor of India. Edmund Burke led the case against Hastings, emphasizing Hastings's responsibility for a vast system of colonial corruption and suffering. Hastings here seems guilty of the bribery with which he was charged—but Fox, Burke's colleague, draws attention to his own status as the son of Lord Holland, the infamous "public defaulter of unaccounted millions." The coalition government of Fox and North, formed after Fox's numerous attacks on North's management of North American affairs, had been overturned by the defeat of Fox's East India Bill: the exchange between North and Sheridan emphasizes the tenuousness of political alliances and undercuts the "justice" of Hastings's execution.

25. *The Artist: A Collection of Essays Relative to Painting, Poetry, Sculpture, Architecture, the Drama, Discoveries of Science, and Various Other Subjects*, 2 vols., ed. Prince Hoare (London, 1802), 1:7.